René Guénon – "The Illusion of 'Ordinary Life'" (excerpt)

It is true that scientific conceptions will continue to develop for some time; indeed, at this stage, even the very notion of *"matter"* seems to be vanishing. The trouble, however, is that since the *"descent"* of the cycle (*descente cyclique*) is not yet completed, the "cracks" that appear can only open from below; in other words, what "interferes" with the sensible world through them is nothing other than the *lower psychism*—in its most destructive and dissolving aspects.

It is therefore easy to understand that everything tending to encourage or extend such "interferences," whether consciously or not, merely represents a new phase of the same deviation of which materialism was only a less "advanced" stage, whatever appearances may suggest.

The derisory security of "ordinary life" is indeed gravely threatened—and we shall see more and more clearly that it was only an illusion. But is there really any reason to rejoice in this—except to fall into another illusion, still worse than the first: that of an *"inverted spirituality"* (*spiritualité à rebours*), of which the various *neo-spiritualist* movements that have arisen and developed up to now are only weak and mediocre precursors?

— **René Guénon**

Frithjof Schuon – "On Sacrifice" (*Du Sacrifice*)

1.

The theory of sacrifice is inseparable from that of manifestation itself, in the ontological or cosmological sense of the term; therefore, to properly situate the question, it is necessary first to consider this manifestation as such—that is, the very process of manifestation. We may choose, as an example of this process, one of its particular modalities, namely the manifestation of sound, which is primordial in the order of sensory perceptions; we shall then see how it symbolically retraces the process in question, just as does any other modality. Indeed, in order to extend itself in duration, sound must in some sense pass through a series of vibrations—or, in other words, sound can only manifest by means of a kind of pauses or voids that prolong it in a certain way; and here there appears very clearly the law of compensation inherent in all manifestation. When these pauses or voids are regarded as "sacrifices" in relation to the manifestation of which they nevertheless constitute an indispensable element, one immediately understands the way in which sacrifice forms an integral part of manifestation, and the role it is called upon to play when understood in its proper sense—that is, when the idea it expresses is applied to the human order, whether individual or social.

Returning to our example of sound, we may add that if one were to abstract from this "void" whose application to the human order is sacrifice, the manifestation would have to reduce itself to a sort of instantaneous explosion that would centralize within itself all the power—or, if one prefers, all the vitality—of the sound, a power that, under normal conditions, asserts itself precisely through the force and duration of the sound. Thus, sound manifested in duration may be regarded, in relation to the instantaneous sound whose possibility we have just provisionally supposed, as the broken refraction of that sound; and likewise, every manifestation whatsoever implies such a refraction of a prototype conceived in an "instantaneous" mode.

One cannot, however, say that an "instantaneous" or "central" manifestation is an impossibility in every respect; it is rather a relative possibility within the

framework of its own impossibility, if such an expression is permissible—that is, it is realized symbolically within normal manifestation, and then assumes either a malefic or benefic aspect. But this question is too complex for us to dwell on it further here, and we shall limit ourselves to citing, as respective examples, that of the cataclysm and that of the miracle.

2.

By applying this theory to universal manifestation itself, we shall say that the "medium" of its realization is Existence, and that its "vibration" is the cyclic sequence to which all modalities of universal manifestation are subjected; but one could also consider the differentiation inherent in the manifested Universe as its "vibratory" mode of realization. The principle of this manifestation is then Being, which remains outside of Existence; and, in an analogous way, the principle of sound or of any other sensory perception remains outside of its medium of realization or refraction—that is, of time and space.

We described earlier the vibration as implying pauses or voids that follow one another in a continuous rhythm; it is however fitting to specify that these pauses or voids are such only in relation to the positive phases of the vibration, just as, in the life of a terrestrial being, sleeps are pauses only in relation to the waking state, and just as, in an individual cycle of existence, deaths are pauses only in relation to lives. Indeed, there is no break in continuity in a "vibration"—or rather, the break in continuity observed therein is only apparent and very relative, as is moreover proved by the perfect homogeneity of the "rhythm." This appears very clearly when one represents the vibration by a sine curve: this can be considered as divided into two parts by its horizontal axis; the upper part and the lower part would then represent respectively the two positive and negative phases of the vibration. The positive phase, formed in a sensory perception by the series of moments of perception, could be defined, in a universal sense, as the symbolic affirmation of the principal non-manifested, and thus as manifestation; the negative phase, constituted by what we have called the "pauses" or "voids," would represent the symbolic recapitulation of the state of non-manifestation; as for the line that separates the two vibratory

phases, one could consider it as the limit of inversion between the non-manifested and the manifested.

When this image is transposed into the cosmic mode, one arrives at the conception of what the Hindus call the "days" and "nights" of Brahma—that is, the cyclic alternation concerning universal manifestation, which moreover allows for the conception of Creation itself. It is from this sole point of view that there is truly a break in continuity, since it is in this cosmic "vibration" alone that manifestation is effectively dissolved—or rather, reintegrated—into the non-manifested, although, in the deepest sense, one must also envisage here a sort of continuity. By contrast, as the symbolic reflections of this universal vibration become relative, the continuity of the vibratory phases becomes all the more manifest: in the sensible or corporeal world, there are no longer any true ruptures between these phases; thus, the waking state and the sleep state are always linked and unified by life, which does not cease, just as, in a much less restricted order, the individual cycles or "lives" of the same being are always linked by that being's individuality.

This law, however, involves a compensation in the inverse sense: if it is true that the discontinuity between the vibratory phases is diminished in the various relative orders—owing to the fact that the vibration itself occurs only within a very restricted domain, so that there cannot be differences as rigorous as those which, in the higher orders, arise from the infinity of the Divine Principle or the universal All-Possibility—it remains no less true that this quasi-"substantial" continuity is compensated by a greater discontinuity within the vibration as such, which can then manifest in a much less rigorous manner than in the more general or universal orders. Thus, to return to the example of sleep, it differs only very relatively from wakefulness, since the individual continues to live in both states; by contrast, the individual can, to a certain extent, dispense with sleeping or waking, which constitutes exceptions impossible in an order as general as that of sensory perception or simply physical existence—and all the more so in the universal orders, where no exception could possibly occur. But on the other hand, if in the Universal the vibratory phases follow one another rigorously—that is, if the cyclic sequence admits no gaps—these phases or cycles themselves are all the more different from one another, and this precisely because the resorption or reintegration of the manifested into the non-

manifested, instead of being merely symbolic, is here effective, as we have said above; whereas, if there is scarcely any difference between one sleep and another, it is precisely because there is no true break in continuity.

In an order as relative as that of terrestrial life—considered solely in relation to the individual who undergoes it, and not in its intimate structure—the universal law of the manifestation process need not realize itself or symbolize itself with absolute rigor, since the order of individual will stands, in a certain sense, at the extreme opposite from that of divine will, that is, from principial or universal determination. If this is so, it is because the orders that appear relatively the most distant from principial immutability are thereby mirrors of the Divine Principle, by virtue of the inversion that exists between Principle and manifestation; and since individual will, in its positive essence and its reality, is a reflection of Divine Liberty, it can apparently contradict the natural law and realize the exceptions of which we spoke earlier. One may therefore say of the same individual that, although he is subject in an absolute manner to the law of vibratory manifestation solely in respect of his manifestation as such, he is subject to it only relatively in respect of his voluntary life, which is founded on what one may call "free will." Under the first aspect, man, like every being or every thing, is—speaking in Islamic language—naturally *muslim* ("submitted" or "resigned"), that is, conformed to the universal principles or, in other words, to the Divine Will; but under the second aspect, that of man's relative liberty, he may not be *muslim*, and then he is either *mushrik* ("associator") when he considers himself as real in the same degree as the Divine Will, or *kâfir* ("infidel" or "denier") when he considers himself as the sole reality and the sole sufficient reason for his acts. These two negative attributes of *mushrik* and *kâfir* moreover concern, to a certain extent, every man and even every being, without this implying, assuredly, that the being is necessarily characterized by these determinations; *shirk* ("association") and *kufr* ("negation") correspond to the *tamas* ("ignorance" or "obscurity") of Hindu doctrine, *tawhîd* ("union" or "unification") corresponding then to *sattva* ("goodness" or "conformity"), while the *rajas* ("passion") of that same doctrine is implied either in *tawhîd* or in *shirk* or *kufr*; these two tendencies are, like the "attributes" or *gunas* of the Hindus, qualities inherent in the primordial substance itself from which all manifestation proceeds.

One sees, then, that man, insofar as he participates in Divine Liberty by his individual liberty, represents for the entire terrestrial being—which encompasses all the kingdoms of nature—the central locus where such a participation, relatively direct, in Divine Liberty or Indetermination is realized; and this moreover explains the "right" that man has over the kingdoms of nature, a "right" that comes into play notably in sacrifice as well. The voluntary life of man is, consequently, a manifestation which, from the human point of view, is not spontaneously regulated or, so to speak, "automatically," as is the case for every simply "passive" or "physical" manifestation; it belongs to man to conform his own manifestation—and thus his life—to the universal and divine Norm: and it is here that Tradition intervenes for him, and more particularly that central element, in a certain respect, which we designate by the term "sacrifice."

One may consider Tradition itself as a sort of "sacrifice" in relation to strictly profane life, which of itself introduces no supra-individual element; indeed, every rite constitutes a pause in the flux of that life, and a sort of death in relation to it. This is visible in a particularly clear way in Islamic ritual; the prayer repeated five times a day constitutes, in effect, a sacrifice from the point of view of purely terrestrial and mundane life, since prayer is a sort of death for this world, precisely because it introduces a supra-individual element that transcends life and contradicts it in a certain sense. That said, we shall come to sacrifice in its proper and immediate sense.

3.

What we have said about manifestation and its realization in the "vibratory" mode allows us to glimpse the scope of sacrifice in the usual sense of the word; this sacrifice concerns the manifestation of terrestrial life, at least in an immediate way, for it cannot exclude the higher significations that it necessarily entails, and then it concerns, by symbolic transposition, the entirety of universal manifestation, of which terrestrial life, being a microcosm, is evidently a symbol. Bloody sacrifice thus constitutes a sort of reminiscence of the transcendent Principle that is beyond life and is the positive and divine Cause of it, or again a sort of reference to the Non-manifested from which all

manifestation ontologically derives. Life being a "gift" bestowed by the universal Cause which, in this regard, is regarded as "Creator," those who benefit from this gift must, in order to spiritualize it—by referring to its symbolic quality—and in order thereby to render it more prosperous and more enduring, return to the Creator or the Giver a part of His Gift, and thus of life itself; this then constitutes a spiritual affirmation identical to that contained in the Islamic testimony of faith: "There is no divinity but The Divinity" (*la ilaha illâ Llâh*), or, in the application that more particularly suits here: "There is no life but The Life," in the transposed and absolute sense of which this term is capable.

This affirmation or homage expressed by sacrifice is moreover found in the most diverse forms, whether bloody or non-bloody: thus, the ancient Greeks poured out a few drops of the wine they were about to drink; many peoples, the Hindus for example, eat only after having offered a share to the divinities, so that they are nourished, in the final analysis, only by sacrificial remnants; and if Muslims and Jews drain all the blood from the meat they consume, the same intention plays the principal role there. We shall add yet another example from a different order: the warriors of certain North American tribes sacrificed a finger to the "Great Spirit" at the moment of their warrior initiation; it is noteworthy that fingers are, in a certain respect, the most precious thing for the warrior, the man of action, and that it is precisely for this reason that the sacrifice is performed on them. On the other hand, the fact that one possesses ten fingers and sacrifices one—that is, a tenth of what represents our activity—is highly significant, first because the number ten is that of the accomplished or fully realized cycle, and second because of the analogy that exists between the sacrifice we have just mentioned and the Muslim *zakkât*, which is the alms ordained by sacred legislation and consists precisely in a tenth. It is then said that, in order to preserve and increase goods, one prevents the cycle of prosperity from closing, by sacrificing the tenth—that is, the part that would precisely constitute the completion and end of the cycle. The word *zakkât* itself has the double sense of "purification" and "growth," terms whose close relation appears very clearly in the example of the pruning of plants. The word *zakkât* comes etymologically from the verb *zakâ*, which means "to prosper" or "to purify," or again, in another acceptation, "to levy" or "to pay" the sacred contribution, or yet "to increase." Let us also recall, in this order of

ideas, the Arabic expression *dîn*, which means not only "Tradition," according to the most common acceptation, but also "Judgment" and, with a slightly different vocalization that makes the word pronounced *dayn*, "debt"; here again, the respective senses of the word cohere, Tradition being regarded as man's debt toward the "Giver" (*el-Zahhâb*) or the "Creator" (*el-Khâliq*); and the "Day of Judgment" (*yawmi ed-Dîn*) spoken of in the *Fâtihah*, that "day" of which Allâh is called the "King" (*mâlik*), is none other than the day of the "payment of the debt" of the individual toward his universal Cause, which is the sufficient reason for every individual being.

Returning to bloody sacrifice, which relates, as we have seen, more particularly to life, there is evidently nothing arbitrary in the fact that it is blood which is poured out to the Creative Principle or Giver, since blood, as is well known, is rightly regarded as the most immediate vehicle of life, a fact made manifest by its circulation on the one hand and by its warmth on the other; it is in it also that the psychic elements enter into connection with the corporeal modality, and this is one of the reasons why, in certain traditions, its consumption is forbidden. There is, in sacrifice itself, something analogous to a bloodletting; the body of the patient then corresponds to the human collectivity which gives of its blood, either by pouring out that of some members themselves of this collectivity, or by substituting animals for them. We touch here on a very important question, that of the difference between human sacrifice and animal sacrifice; indeed, when one places oneself from the point of view of the preceding considerations and what they implicitly affirm, one must conclude that, for a human collectivity, it is human beings who must constitute the payment of the "tenth."

This is true for a society in which cyclical conditions have not yet necessitated a readaptation of bloody sacrifice—that is, a transfer, as regards the victim, from man to animal; by contrast, a society which, owing to certain cyclical conditions, could no longer truly benefit from human sacrifice, would risk seeing it deviate, if it maintained it, in a sense diametrically opposed to the original sense, and the replacement of the human victim by the animal victim then becomes imperative. This transfer is perfectly valid from the point of view of the "technique," if one may say so, of sacrifice, provided that animals, without of course belonging to the human species, nevertheless belong, like us, to the living and terrestrial collectivity, and in a more particular way to the

collectivity of beings characterized by the same warm blood; thus sacrifice makes the animal participate in the traditional life which, in any cyclical epoch whatsoever, is the expression of a spiritual reality that also concerns animals. To elucidate this question fully, one would need to refer to the theory of the terrestrial collectivity regarded as a unique being with multiple and hierarchized modalities, a being whose central modality is man; but as these considerations enter only quite indirectly into the theory of sacrifice, we must limit ourselves to mentioning them as merely indicative. We may still point out that, under another respect, the animal is sacrificed insofar as it is a precious property of man; and human sacrifice too consists, under the same respect, in immolating a property—that is, the most precious property of the human or terrestrial collectivity: indeed, the most precious sacrifice consists in the abandonment of a part of the one who sacrifices, as the example of the Indian warriors has shown us.

The passage from human sacrifice to animal sacrifice is marked, in the three monotheistic traditions (2), by the sacrifice of a ram substituted by God for Abraham's son (1); it should be noted, however, for those who would oppose human sacrifice for individualistic reasons, that Abraham had no occasion to adopt that point of view, any more than any sacrificer in the traditions where human sacrifice was a regular institution—as was the case, for example, at a period relatively very close to our own, among the Hindus and, in a non-bloody form, among the Chinese (2).

4.

When one considers the evangelical precept: "Love thy neighbor as thyself"—which means neither "Love thy neighbor more than thyself" nor "Love not thyself," but rather "Make no distinction between thy neighbor and thyself"—and takes into account that this precept was uttered by the Christ who voluntarily accomplished a supreme human sacrifice, one will understand the scant importance that must have been attached, in contexts where human sacrifice was a regular institution, to any consideration of the physical or psychic well-being of the victim; only spiritual interest must count, with all that

it entails—and, needless to say, the individual benefits that come in its train. The sacrifice of the Christ is moreover what allows Catholics to slaughter animals without sacrificing them, since the Christ, by His divinity, contains all manifestation, so that, for Catholics, the sacrifice of an animal would be a sort of pleonasm (1); they are, as it were, "covered" or protected by the sacrifice of the Christ, which synthesizes within itself the totality of beings, as we have just said. It is not the same for Protestants or unbelievers, who have no right to take life, given that man is not capable of bestowing it, and who draw down upon their heads, when they kill without sacrifice, a sort of vengeance on the part of the animal species—not to mention the chastisement of the Divinity, in Whose sight the slaughter of profane abattoirs is a sort of theft and outrage. It is doubtless a vague and instinctive awareness of these consequences that leads some to adhere to vegetarianism as if it were a religion; one may say that they do so out of a bad conscience, without of course realizing how logical and prudent their vegetarianism is for them; for if they did realize it, they would not hesitate for an instant to attach themselves to a tradition, rather than seeking to escape certain effects of heterodoxy or unbelief. As for peoples who live by hunting, one cannot say that they necessarily kill in the manner of a profane man of the modern world; there is doubtless no people, outside the modern world, that is devoid of all traditional link, and as soon as this is so, man is bound by ritual dispositions—whether these extend to everything, or whether man is dispensed from them in certain cases by a sort of traditional compensation, as is the case with Catholics who may kill animals without rite. It is however probable that certain peoples omit, owing to degeneration, rites that they primitively observed; in others, every act of life—and notably the hunt, which is the basis of their material existence—is sacralized: for example, the Redskin hunter, when he had felled a bison, would smoke the calumet before it—the "pipe of Peace," a ritual instrument made of sacred clay—and blow the smoke, which he habitually directed toward the six directions of space, toward the muzzle of the slain animal, so as to reconcile himself, as it were, with what one may call the "genius of the species." Quite analogous rites take place among the Ainus and most of the peoples of Siberia, and also among the African Pygmies.

We said above that human sacrifice risked deviating, in certain cases—as may moreover happen with any symbol—from the "qualitative" to the "quantitative," or from rite to superstition, so that it may lead to something diametrically opposed to the original sacrifice; this was the case with the Aztecs and several more or less degenerate peoples. Where spirituality has darkened, a sacrifice or a prayer no longer addresses the Divinity or one of Its aspects, but an entity psychic in nature, created and sustained by collective adoration, which itself is likewise merely psychic; one cannot say that such an entity is absent in a normal tradition, but there it is of lesser importance and of a higher substance, and serves simply as a support for divine influences—just as, in the individual, the psychic or mental elements play an analogous role in relation to the irradiations of the Intellect. When divine influences have withdrawn from a traditional form, and this entity subsists alone, abandoned to itself and to its ignorant servants, it inevitably becomes a psychic vampire for the latter, and serves as a dwelling and instrument for tenebrous influences (1); it was for this reason that Mohammed overthrew the idols of Mecca, which had become condensing pivots for such influences; and this also explains why one of the Muslims contemporary with the Prophet could see, at the moment when he broke an idol and recited the *shahâdah*, a black and hideous apparition escaping from the interior of the statue. It is the same with sacrifice as with any cult: it may degenerate into something analogous to idolatry, and then it becomes orgiastic and serves only to nourish a monstrous psychic entity, created, as we have said, by the psychic emanations of its adorers and athirst for the blood that is its life-support. Decadences of this order always occur where cultic forms are no longer adapted to the conditions of a cyclical ambience; these forms are then nothing more than vestiges that continue to live a purely mechanical life, so to speak—just as a decapitated body may still undergo nervous contractions. It is then that there intervene, in most cases, either a traditional form adapted to the cyclical conditions, or simple destruction.

In this order of ideas, one must take care not to confuse deviations properly so-called with the forms under which they occur—forms that confound the imagination and sentiment simply because they are no longer conformed to the general conditions of our cyclical epoch. Thus, one cannot affirm that anthropophagy, for example, constitutes a deviation in itself, or that it has everywhere and always had the reprehensible character that it may have among

the savages who practice it; that it is, on the contrary, susceptible of a positive and elevated signification is evident from a rite such as the Catholic communion, concerning which one must recall the words of the Christ who instituted it—words whose symbolism would not be possible if it did not refer to a reality corresponding to their immediate and literal sense. Communion, indeed, is not without relation to a ritual consumption of human flesh; in both cases, it is to appropriate the qualities of the sacrificed one that one consumes his flesh, whether these qualities are spiritual or divine, as in the case of the Eucharist, or simply human, as in the anthropophagy of savages. Conversely, it is to avoid appropriating certain qualities of an inferior order that one refrains from eating certain animals, and this is the sense of the prohibition of pork among the monotheistic Semites; the animal fit to serve as food for man must therefore be, in a certain sense, a sacred animal, which is expressed by saying that it is "pure," and this brings us once again close to the symbolism of Christian communion (1). If, in the latter, the quantity of the "species" plays no role, it is always by virtue of the law inherent in all symbolism—a law that demands a rigorous subordination of the substantial or quantitative aspect to the essential and qualitative aspect, a relation that is demonstrated, as we have said, by the refusal of the Christ to wash the whole body of Saint Peter (2); and it is also this law that explains why vicious exaggerations, such as gluttony or lust, are not susceptible of sacralization, whereas nutrition and cohabitation are precisely so by virtue of their symbolic quality, founded on ontological analogies—or, to speak without any restriction, on metaphysical analogies that relate every symbol to the Divine Principle.

It remains for us, on this occasion, to respond to the following objection: by what "right" can a sacrificer immolate an individual against the latter's will? The answer is given by the example of the Indian warrior who sacrifices a finger to Wakonda: by what "right" do the fingers of the right hand cut off a finger of the left hand? It immediately follows from this example that the sacrificer evidently does not act as an individual, but simply as an instrument of the collectivity which, being the totality, evidently has all rights over its own part—the individual—provided, of course, that this totality is unified by a spiritual bond, a bond that is represented, in the example of the Indian warrior, by his intelligence that governs his actions; from this point of view, the reaction of the

individual, whether human or animal, is of no importance, neither for the validity of the rite nor for the posthumous conditions of the immolated one.

5.

Feudal war, too, involves an aspect of sacrifice—not insofar as it represents a general manifestation of the unfavorable conditions of our cyclical epoch, but rather insofar as it has a positive signification, and thus represents a sort of law, a modus vivendi, or a discipline for a given human collectivity. In this order of ideas, there would be many further developments to make concerning another mode of warlike sacrifice, seppuku—known in the West more generally under the name of harakiri—the ritual suicide of the Shintoists; however, what we have said previously contains implicitly the elements necessary for understanding this very particular case of human sacrifice. One single remark seems opportune on this subject: namely, that harakiri, by the fact that it constitutes a rite pertaining to a traditional perspective which, by definition, is a sort of closed and homogeneous system whose elements are in no way assimilable to other traditional forms—these elements being compossible only within their own framework—harakiri, we say, does not in any way fall under the law of vulgar and non-ritual suicide, provided that it is "covered" by the traditional dispositions of Shintoism. Of a rather different character was the sacrifice of kings, another form of ritual suicide practiced formerly in certain regions of India and in various other countries: the sovereign, after having reigned for a determined number of years, had to put himself to death by a torture to which his successor and the assembled people were witnesses. Moreover, the sacred code of the Hindus, the Mânava-Dharma-Shâstra, contains several dispositions that may be regarded as belonging to this same category of facts arising from the idea of sacrifice—facts that shock to an extreme degree the individualistic imagination of the moderns.

It is not surprising, given the specifically individualistic development of Western civilization, that little trace remains in the West of this fundamental idea of sacrifice—apart, of course, from the Judaeo-Islamic immolation and the Catholic Eucharist—and that moreover the last ritual manifestations of this idea

are targeted, in certain countries, by prohibitions that seem intent on completing the rupture, already realized in so many respects, between man and God.

6.

There is, apart from sacrifice properly so-called, yet another mode of realization of the same idea—a mode that concerns not the collectivity but the individual alone, at least immediately: and it is in this order that one must classify ascetic practices, from simple abstentions to the methodical or violent mortifications to which certain ascetics subject themselves. In this order of ideas, however, sacrifice no longer has the rigorously defined value that it possessed in the strictly ritual order: it is, here, above all a speculative support for the one who practices it, and its form or quality has value only in that sense, so that it would be erroneous to attribute to any given form of ascetic practice an absolute value that only the spiritual fruit obtained through that practice could possess. In other terms, ascetic sacrifice has value only insofar as it suggests—through its lived symbolism and by virtue of its transformative power, which assimilates it symbolically to fire—transcendent truths; that is, insofar as it aids in effecting contacts with spiritual realities or superior states. This alone matters here, whatever be the path that leads to it, and all possible practices, however indispensable they may be for this or that individual, are but of little account in the face of Knowledge. To attribute absolute value to a disciplinary abstention—such as fasting, silence, solitude, or chastity, which are evidently sacrifices—amounts to a sort of superstition of the fact, a superstition that readily arises where one has come, at least in practice, to substitute morality for the Idea; one then forgets the speculative possibilities inherent in the symbolism of enjoyment, a symbolism that can doubtless be replaced by that of suffering but which, in most cases, is simply more or less compensated by the latter—so that it is the equilibrium between these two opposed symbolisms that constitutes the path. Moreover, even where one places oneself almost exclusively from the point of view of sacrifice—as is the case in Christianity and Buddhism, which cannot, given their fundamental symbolism, adopt any other point of view—one is nevertheless obliged to make some room for the opposed symbolism, and vice versa; so that, between these two complementary symbolisms—whose

complementarity is clearly affirmed in the Hindu tradition by the division into Shaivism and Vaishnavism—there is always, in the final analysis, only a predominance of the one over the other, in conformity with the symbolism that determines the very form of the tradition in question.

In summary, if sacrifice does not impose itself upon man in an exclusive manner—that is, in such a way as to leave no room for a different attitude, as those would wish who attribute to it an absolute value that only the supreme end can possess—it is because we are not manifestation in every respect; and one may say that the less we are so, the less sacrifice concerns us, since no contingency of the manifested can then reach our contemplative state. On the other hand, sacrifice does not necessarily realize itself in perfect simultaneity on all the planes of our reality; thus, the supreme sacrifice that is spiritual poverty (*el-faqr* in Arabic) is independent, in principle, of analogous attitudes realized on an inferior or more exterior plane.

But one might still express oneself differently, in a sense somehow inverse to the preceding formulation, and say that sacrifice imposes itself insofar as it is of a high order, because it ultimately identifies itself with the attainment of which it is then nothing more than the negative aspect; but in that case, it is no longer a matter of sacrifice in the ordinary sense—that is, in the sense of a privation separated from its purpose. Indeed, spiritual poverty is an inseparable aspect of spiritual plenitude, which is a direct participation in divine Plenitude; and when one places oneself at the point of view of this Plenitude, by virtue of an initiatic grace, one will understand the meaning of this saying that we heard from an Arab dervish: "It is not I who left the world; it is the world that left me."

— **Frithjof Schuon**

THE EXIT FROM THE CAVE

The final exit from the initiatic cave, considered as representing the "exit from the cosmos," seems, from what we have said previously, to be effected normally through an opening situated in the vault, and at its very zenith; we recall that this upper door, which is sometimes traditionally designated as the "solar hub" and also as the "cosmic eye," corresponds, in the human being, to the *Brahma-randhra* and the crown of the head. However, despite the references to solar symbolism that are encountered in such cases, one might say that this "axial" and "zenithal" position relates more directly—and doubtless also more primitively—to a polar symbolism: this point is the one where, according to certain "operative" rituals, the "plumb line of the Great Architect" is suspended, which marks the direction of the "Axis of the World," and it is then identified with the Polar Star itself (1). It is also fitting to remark that, for the exit to be effected in this way, a stone from the vault must be removed precisely at that spot; and this stone, by the very fact that it occupies the summit, has a special and even unique character in the architectural structure, for it is naturally a "keystone"; this observation is not without importance, although it is not the place here to insist upon it further (2).